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THE JEWISH RESETTLEMENT OF PALESTINE.

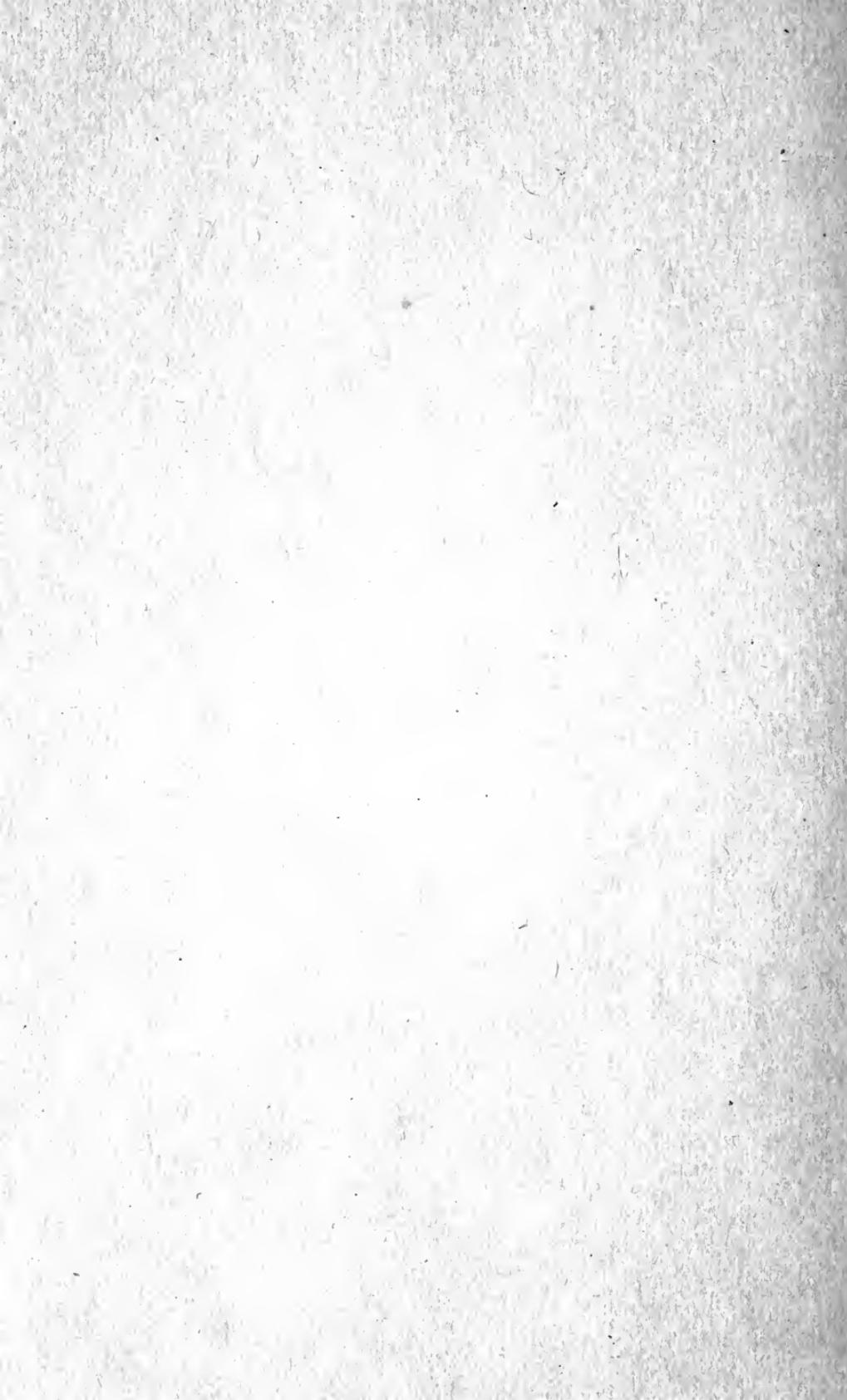
**Address delivered at the Annual Conference of the
English Zionist Federation on February 3rd, 1918,**

by

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The Jewish Resettlement of Palestine.

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

There is, I think, in history hardly a more tragically moving instance of fidelity of a nation to its ancestral home than that which is offered by the Jewish people carrying with it all through the ages of its long exile its undying love of Zion and its perpetual hope of being restored one day to its ancient land. Whereas all emotions and aspirations in the life of individual man as well as in the life of nations, if not fulfilled within a reasonable space of time, are gradually atrophied and die away, the longing of the Jew for Zion has become stronger with each century, until at last it has found expression in what is commonly, but very improperly, called the Jewish Colonisation of Palestine. Colonisation means the departure from the main body of a nation of groups of citizens who leave their homes to settle in foreign countries, either to people them or to open them to economic exploitation. The motives that prompt these groups to emigrate may be of an economic, social, religious, or merely political nature; but whatever be these motives, the effect of colonisation is uniformly that of calling into being in regions more or less distant from the mother-country communities of men sprung from a common stock, who, whether or not the colonies remain politic-

ally united with the mother-country, are expected to continue to look to that country as the cradle of their culture and to draw from it the ever-renewed inspiration which will ensure the perpetuation of the particular *ethos* of the race. The Jewish re-settlement of Palestine has nothing in common with "Colonisation" in the true sense of that term, as just defined; it is rather the exact reverse. It may be said for those who first used the term "Colonisation" in this connection that there was no more proper term available, for the particular migration of which the Jewish re-settlement of Palestine is the expression has no precedent in history and therefore has no name.

Indeed, Jewish colonisation in Palestine, unlike the colonisation of other peoples, is not a movement of national expansion, but a movement of national reunion. It is not a centrifugal but a centripetal force, which entails not a dispersion but a concentration of energy, a concentration in fact of all the living forces in Jewry on one single and central purpose. That explains why those who during the last thirty odd years have gone out to Palestine as pioneers are really in a certain sense an *élite* from among the Jewish people, and why they have been able in such a comparatively short time to achieve at least as great results and as notable successes in their colonising work as any other, even the most experienced, colonising peoples of ancient times or of to-day have ever achieved; and that notwithstanding the special difficulties in their way. Whereas the British, French, and German settlers who have gone abroad could count on the support and protection of the most powerful nations of the world, the Jews in Palestine have constantly laboured under the greatest disadvantages, the policy of the Turkish Government with regard to the Jewish colonisation having consistently been one of systematic obstruction. Yet they have persevered in their efforts, and by demonstrating that both the country—Palestine and the people—the Jewish settlers—are possessed of the attributes which are essential for the successful reconstitution of our national home, they have convinced the world of the practicability of our objects and have thus contributed, more than any other agency, to winning recognition, sympathy, and practical support for our national aspirations. For however beautiful and just a cause may

be and however numerous and sincere be the expressions of sympathy which it may receive, still that sympathy will remain purely platonic, and responsible statesmen and governments will not dare to associate themselves with the cause so long as they are not convinced of the possibility of the practical realisation of its objects. This test of practicability is the rock on which most new ideas, in politics just as in ordinary life, are wrecked. Now for the outside world Zionism was a new idea, Palestine was a waste, and the Jews were constitutionally unfit for the task of developing a country the basis of whose economic life is the cultivation of the land. But the new Yishub has proved to the world that while it is true that for nearly two thousand years the land, bereft of its children, has been a "land that was desolate," and whereas it is also true that through the effects of its long exile from the land the people in its turn seemed to have lost all or nearly all those attributes of the mind and the body without which success in agriculture is difficult if not impossible, yet the reunion of the people and the land has changed both of them, has restored to the one its pristine fertility and to the other its ancient strength: a miracle that reminds us of the Greek legend of Antæus, son of the sea god and of the earth, whom Herakles fought and who became weak and powerless when lifted up into the air, but whose invincible strength was given back to him as soon as his feet came into contact with his mother earth.

Indeed, one cannot help wondering which of the two miracles is the greater one: the revival of Palestine at the hands of the Jews, or the regeneration of the Jew through contact with the soil of Palestine.

Yet only little more than thirty years have passed since the first settlers arrived in the country straight from Russia and Roumania. Most of them were children of the town, none had the least knowledge of agriculture, of the geography of Palestine, of the language and customs of the Arabs, or of even the most elementary principles of hygiene, the observance of which was essential in a country with climatic and sanitary conditions so different from all they had been accustomed to before. Their ignorance in this respect went so far that some of them, when they built their houses, actually provided them with stoves on the Russian pat-

tern. Such were the people.

Now just try to imagine the state of the country. There were no roads, no railways; a few wells whose primitive pumps were worked by a camel or a donkey gave hardly enough water for the domestic requirements of the scanty Arab population; no safety at all, the towns being hardly less insecure than the open country; and fever everywhere, due more than to any other agency to the apathy and neglect shown by the Government regarding anything concerning the public weal. The soil itself, tortured for centuries by a most exacting system of tillage wherein restitutions in the shape of manure found no place, had lost much of its once vaunted fertility. In the mountainous parts of the country the destructive hand of time had been allowed to lay in ruins the walls and terraces that had in olden times maintained on the surface of the rocks a layer of good soil, thanks to which the western seaward slopes of the mountains of Judah were covered with one never-ending succession of vineyards and of orchards of olives and almonds; and as a result of the decay of these terraces, the fertile layer of soil had been washed away by the torrential winter rains, and the bare rock on which no tree will take root stared to heaven like a mute yet eloquent witness of the criminal incapacity of the dwellers in the land and their governments. Such was the country.

But, just as from the shock of cold flint and cold steel the spark is born that lay asleep in them, so the reunion of the desolate land and the weary people seem to have called back to active life the whole strength, resourcefulness genius for agriculture, and love of earth that had lain dormant in Israel since its divorce from the land. With Arab primitive tools and methods the settlers started work. Unskilled as they were, and without technical guidance, they undertook the sanitation of fever-infested parts, meanwhile (as was the case in Petach-Tikvah) establishing provisional homes on higher grounds sometimes situated at a great distance from the fields. The soil was drained and put under proper cultivation, eucalyptuses were planted by the hundreds of thousands; slowly but surely the struggle against malaria progressed. To-day, with but very few exceptions, the sanitary conditions of the colonies are excellent; but the white tombs under

the eucalyptuses of Chederah testify to the price which this peaceful victory of man over the evil powers of Nature has cost.

Another difficulty the settlers had to meet was that of the total absence of public safety in the country. They first entrusted Arab watchmen with the task of protecting their fields and plantations. But they soon found out that these watchmen generally made common cause with the surrounding marauders, organising pilfering on a large scale, and thus multiplying the danger of conflicts and bloodshed. Then it was that a number of Jewish workmen organised the "Hashomer," an organisation of exclusively Jewish watchmen for the protection of the Jewish colonies. It is no exaggeration to say that previous to the British occupation the Hashomer was the most efficient or, rather, the only efficient, police force in the country. The Shomrim, through their skill as watchmen and through their great courage, have won the highest prestige amongst the Arab population of Palestine, and it is thanks to their devotion that the inviolability of Jewish property has been secured and that the degree of safety which prevails in and around the Jewish colonies exceeds by far that which is the rule in the other parts of the country. But here again, this priceless result has been achieved only at the cost of many a precious young Jewish life, and there is hardly an important colony in Palestine in the defence of which a Jewish watchman has not laid down his life. The memory of these young men will live eternally in our hearts, and in ages to come, when our national restoration has become an accomplished fact, the names of these modest heroes will be remembered as the names of some of the best sons of our people.

Bad sanitary conditions and insecurity were only part of the early troubles which beset the Jewish settlers. They had come to cultivate again the soil of our fathers, but they were ignorant of the most elementary rules of agriculture. Still, far from being discouraged, they started by copying the primitive methods of their Arab neighbours; little by little they became acquainted with the nature of the land and with the requirements of the crops; little by little they gathered information about the methods in use in the advanced agricultural countries of Europe and America, tried these methods, modified them and adapted them to the

needs of their lands. The result of these efforts has been a triumphant refutation of the fallacy that the Jews are incapable of becoming good agriculturists; indeed, there is no profession or occupation in Palestine in which the Jews have proved as successful as in various aspects of agriculture, such as fruit-growing, cattle-breeding, and the wine industry. The yields of their crops are more than double those of the fellahs; so, too, with the yield of their milch cows. And Arab landowners have repeatedly used Jewish agricultural workmen for the creation of new plantations and for the more delicate operation of grafting their fruit-trees. What more convincing demonstration could one require of the skill of our farmers and planters?

But crops, once gathered in, must be transported to the markets or to the harbours from which they can be shipped abroad; and in the Palestine of pre-war times there were very few roads indeed, and these were in such a bad state that it was the custom to travel through the fields alongside the roads, the latter serving only to indicate the right direction. The Jewish settlers repaired the old roads that connected the various colonies with each other or with the towns, and where roads did not exist at all they built them at their own expense.

And all the while this handful of men, fighting and overcoming difficulties which would have seemed insuperable to the hardest and best trained farmers of any old agricultural country, all the while they were building up, silently and modestly, what has become probably the greatest of all their achievements—the Hebrew schools. The Hebrew *Gymnasium* (Higher Grade School) of Tel-Aviv with its 700 pupils is known, I am sure, to all of you; and such episodes as the fight against the Hilfsverein in defence of Hebrew as the language of instruction in the schools are fresh in the memories of all. But the amount of patience, of care, of devotion and of sacrifice which the building up and the carrying on of the Hebrew schools has entailed on the part of the settlers, and still more of that admirable body of men who compose the Union of Hebrew Teachers (the “*Mercaz Hamorim*”), can be gauged only by one who has been a daily witness of these efforts. Just try to imagine what it means to carry on schools of all degrees, from the Kindergarten up to the *Gymnasium*, with

Hebrew as the language of instruction and yet almost without Hebrew text-books; and nevertheless to manage to give the pupils an education sufficient to secure for them the right to enter a European or American University on the mere presentation of the leaving certificate of the Hebrew *Gymnasium* of Tel-Aviv. Have not these teachers, too, played nobly the responsible part entrusted to them?

The Hebrew *Gymnasium* is situated in the centre of Tel-Aviv, the new Jewish suburb of Jaffa. Broad streets, lined with well-built houses surrounded by little gardens; green trees alongside the streets and flowers in the squares; everywhere a cleanliness which is probably without parallel in the whole of Palestine and Syria, and which is particularly striking at the very gates of Jaffa, the town of dust and evil smells in summer and of mud and evil smells in winter. Tel-Aviv is, at the doors of the Orient, a true model and object lesson of western cleanliness and hygiene. Its administration, like that of the rural colonies, is carried on by a town council elected by the inhabitants, and I do not think that there are in Europe many towns that are administered more skilfully or with a more solicitous care for the comfort and the health of the citizens than is this small Jewish town, whose white houses and schools situated near the seashore are the first Jewish outposts which the traveller perceives as the ship approaches the old rock-built harbour where the prophet Jonah embarked for his journey to Tarshish.

If Tel-Aviv is an interesting demonstration of the administrative skill and the genius for organisation which characterise the Jewish settlers of Palestine, these qualities appear with still more eloquence in the rural colonies. Let me take as an illustration the colony of Rechoboth, where I lived before the war and of whose Council I had the privilege to be a member.

The Colony is administered by a Council ("Vaad"), which is elected annually by a General Assembly composed of all the owners of land as well as of all those who, without owning any land at all, are ordinarily resident in the colony and have regularly paid their taxes for the last two years. The right to vote is exercised by both men and women. The Vaad controls all the affairs of the community. It supervises the quality of bread sold

by the bakers, it controls the sanitary conditions of the meat supply; it regulates the supply of water for the houses and the gardens; it supervises the health of the flocks; it acts as intermediary between the colonists and the tax-farmers in all matters relating to the taxes payable to the Government. The Vaad determines the annual budget of the colony, and a special sub-committee assesses each year the amount of local taxes to be paid by each family, according to its income and its expenses, due regard being paid to the results obtained from the year's crops; a bachelor pays a larger tax than a family with the same income, and a large family pays a smaller amount of taxes than a small family. The doctor is paid by the colony, so that all persons, rich or poor, have the same right to medical assistance. The chemist too is paid by the colony, and the pharmacy is run out of public money, the prices charged for the medicines being the actual cost price. The local police force is placed under the supervision of a special sub-committee of the Vaad; only Jewish watchmen are employed, and they are paid by the colony. But they are never left alone when actual danger threatens them; and, be it by day or by night, when the village bell which is set up on the summit of one of the hills sounds the alarm there is hardly a more inspiring sight in the world than that of the whole manhood of the colony turning out within five or six minutes from the first signal, fully armed, and hurrying on foot or on horse-back to the place of danger, the doctor following in a cart with all the necessary requisites for first aid, whilst at the same time the chemist and the nurse prepare the village infirmary for the receipt of those who may return wounded. The "Council of Nine" (*Vaad ha-Tisha*), a permanent sub-committee of the Vaad, is entrusted with the revision of and additions to the laws of the colony. An arbitration committee called *Vaad ha-Mishpatim* settles all civil disputes between the colonists. There are two schools—the lay school, which is run by a committee of the parents of the schoolchildren in conjunction with the local teachers, who act as representatives of the Union of Palestinian Teachers (*Mercaz ha-Morim*), and the Talmud-Torah, which is also managed by the parents of the pupils in conjunction with the teachers; but the sanitary condition of both schools, and especially the

health of the children, are under the immediate supervision of the Vaad acting through the doctor, and during recent years compulsory treatment of eye diseases has been introduced. The synagogue, with all that relates to its management, is entrusted to a committee of elders; its budget is covered by those who have seats. In the immediate neighbourhood of the synagogue there is the "People's House (*Beth ha-Am*), where daily, after sunset, when work in the fields and the plantations is finished, the youth of both sexes undergo a course of gymnastic exercises under the guidance of a trained teacher. Here also lectures are given to the parents of the schoolchildren on matters of education and infant hygiene, and other lectures are given to the public on matters of Jewish literature and history, natural science, etc.; here also take place occasional charity fêtes, public receptions, and the general assemblies of the colony. On one of the slopes of the synagogue hill and the adjoining plain there takes place every spring, during the *Hol-ha-Moed* days of Passover, the *Hagigah*, the annual feast where the Jewish youth and manhood of all Palestine gathers in peaceful competition in pedestrian and horse races and in all sorts of games and physical exercises, whilst an agricultural and industrial exhibition acquaints both the colonists and the many foreign tourists who flock to these feasts with the products of Jewish labour in Palestine.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I could go on giving you many more illustrations of the achievements of the Jewish settlers of Palestine in the fields of agriculture, organisation, and administration. But the few I have given should suffice to show that the men of the New Yishub possess both the will and the capacity to render more valuable practical assistance than any other section of our people in the reconstruction of our national home. I also venture to think that you will share my view that the services they have already rendered to that cause and the sacrifices in blood and in treasure they have for more than a generation made in the service of our national redemption entitle the Palestinian settlers to demand that their opinions and their wishes shall be heard before any definite arrangements affecting the future of the Yishub are entered into by the spokesmen of the Jewish nation. I have no doubt that the Jewish Commission which is expected

to go out to Palestine very shortly will bear this fact in mind and will give it most careful consideration.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, if you ask me to define the secret force which has enabled the Jewish settlers in Palestine to achieve their remarkable successes, I will tell you that certainly the more visible cause of these successes is to be found in the typically Jewish perspicacity of the settlers, in their steadfastness, and in their progressive spirit; the less visible but more fundamental secret of their strength lies, however, in their way of understanding the Zionist idea itself, a way so infinitely different from that in which that idea is generally understood in the Galuth. There are at least two ways of understanding an idea: some understand the words, and the words only, which are spoken to them, but some understand the thing itself for which the words are merely the outer and often very poorly fitting garments. Those who understand the words will nod approvingly or admiringly, and may even try to express the same idea in a more fitting or more elegant form, but so far as their actions are concerned they will continue to live as they lived before. The idea has penetrated into their brain, it may perhaps have struck some faint echo in the natural kindheartedness and sensibility of their Jewish mind; but the impenetrable armour of individual egotism shields the Holy of Holies of their souls from contact with unweleome truths, the full realisation of whose strength might perturb their comfortable way of living. Not so with those who understand the thing itself, the real thing. To them the idea is a living light, a flame that burns itself indelibly into their brain, and through their brain into the deepest depths of the heart, breaking down old conceptions, extinguishing old interests, kindling new passions and ambitions, revolutionising the whole being. The veils of voluntary blindness are rent asunder, and the light strikes the remotest corners of the soul with a brightness that compels us to reconsider our whole way of living and to change it so as to bring it into accord with the newly-found truth. That is what the Zionist settlers in Palestine have done. To understand the Zionist idea has meant to them not only to realise its beauty or its practicability, not only to be convinced of its justice, but to draw and accept all the consequences of that

conviction, to live for and in Zion and, if need be, to die for it : that has been the secret of their strength. And the lesson the new Yishub teaches us, the message it sends us, is that the first and most powerful guarantee of success in the realisation of our national aspirations resides not in public sympathy or diplomatic promises, however valuable the assistance these may give us, but in our own sincere and whole-hearted striving towards a deeper and better understanding of the Zionist idea.

